

## **TESTIMONY OF NKALAMO DANIEL NOUMBOUWO**

### **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

June 26, 2014

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Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission today. I would like to share some of my experience with this Congress with the hope this testimony will bring some relief to my people.

Cameroon is located in central Africa and has a population of more than 20 million. It is located in Central Africa and borders Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It consists of approximately 250 ethnic groups. The capital of Cameroon is Yaoundé. It officially has a "democratic and a multi-party system of government." The tyrant Paul Biya has been the president of Cameroon for the past 31 years and is still in power.

Cameroon is reputed for its high rate of human right violations. There are allegations of human rights violations carried out, ordered or condoned by Cameroonian government and security officials. The violations have included extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, unfair trials, and persecution and imprisonment of people for their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Most of the perpetrators of these human rights violations are especially members of law enforcement forces and those in charge of the judiciary system. Freedom of expression and association continue to be severely curtailed. There are cases of journalists, political opponents and human rights defenders being arrested, imprisoned and sometimes tortured solely for expressing their dissenting views or being perceived as critical of the authorities. Most deplorable is the harassment against members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and how the government is denying them their right to freedom of association.

Members of my family; wife, parents, siblings and friends, has been victims of torture, persecution, violence and abuses of all sorts. My entire family has continuously been under the wrath of the "Biya's Regime" since 2003.

My father's involvement in the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), and fight for the Anglophones struggle from 2003 to 2006 when he passed to the Lord, led to his numerous arrests, tortures and subsequent death. On October 1st 2005, my father was arrested because of his involvement in the Southern Cameroons National Council, (SCNC). He had travelled to Tiko on September 30th 2005 for a flag hoisting ceremony which is a yearly anniversary in celebration of Southern Cameroons' independence. Learning of his arrest, my mother, siblings and me, left Kumba for security reasons.

While in jail, my father was tortured and threatened by armed officials to quit participating in the SCNC if he wanted his safety and that of his family or he face the consequences. On

January 13th 2006, my father was released and later died on March 7th 2006 from injuries he sustained while in detention. On April 2006, armed officials visited our family home in Kumba under the pretext that my mother was in possession of certain SCNC documents supposedly kept by my father. After about an hour of fruitless search, their frustration was transferred to my mother. She was beaten and stripped necked, insulted in vulgar languages and promised hell if she does not hand over all SCNC documents in her keeping. She was transported to the police station and after spending three days in a police cell, she was released without any formal charges.

On July 29th 2006, my sponsor and provider, a family friend and the one taking care of me after my father's death, escaped to the United States for fear of persecution.

On October 19th 2010, her daughter who was living with me at the time, escaped to the United States for fear of persecution.

I was arrested three times, abused, tortured and given all sort of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment for keeping a family friend in my apartment when she escaped from jail and for writing an affidavit supporting asylum for her in the US.

On April 1st 2011, the gendarmes raided my apartment, arrested and transported me to the Gendarmerie Brigade in Mbonkomo, near Yaoundé. Without telling me what my crime was, I was beaten, tortured and locked up in a dark, tiny unventilated cell with a wet floor and a tiny bucket to serve as toilet.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012, I experienced the most pathetic and cruel treatment in my life. On this sad day, on arriving home from work, I saw my pregnant wife sitting on the floor naked while being questioned and cursed by the gendarmes. Immediately I stepped and they fell on me like bees in their hives. I was severely beaten, arrested and taken to the gendarmerie brigade at Mbankomo. While I was taken to the brigade, some neighbors helped my wife to the hospital, she later suffered a miscarriage. I was accused of aiding and abating criminals.

On April 7th 2013, my uncle told my wife and me to escape to Nigeria. He said that the police officers he had bribed has been arrested. We were to travel by road through the Kumba – Mamfe highway. Unfortunately, while still in Yaoundé, we met a mixed patrol of police and gendarmes who controlled the area. Our bus got stopped and passengers were asked for their identification cards. When they got to me, I presented mine, and I was asked to step out of the bus.

I was handcuffed, transported and locked up in to a tiny dark cell with live bugs and contaminated water all over the floor. After two days, an officer came to take me for further interrogation. This time I was asked to sit on the floor, stretch out my legs while being whipped under my feet. I was beaten and kicked with boots, until I lost consciousness.

After two months in detention, I became seriously sick and was coughing out blood. I was taken to the military hospital where I received treatment while I handcuffed to the bed.

I succeeded in escaping to the United States with the help of a friend and former secondary school classmate who is now a gendarmerie commander. I left my wife who was four months pregnant. She finally and safely gave birth to my first child, a baby boy, on December 23th 2013. My wife and son are presently in hiding in a village in the southwest region of Cameroon. I miss them so much. This is a cry for help, to the US government, as the voice of the voiceless Cameroonians, suffering masses and those undergoing torture and persecution to:

**Help improve on the deplorable conditions of detention in prisons.** This includes killing detainees attempting to escape, inadequate health services, severe overcrowding, poor food and others cases of ill-treatment. Congress should urge the Cameroon government to take urgent steps to improve conditions everywhere where people are detained, including gendarmerie and police stations. Detention conditions should follow the *Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1988, the Body of Principles contains provisions that protect all people who are held in any type of detention facility. The document is available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/43/a43r173.htm>

According to the Secretary of State in charge of prisons in Cameroon, in August 2010 there were about 24,000 prisoners in Cameroon's 74 prisons. Of these prisons, Kondengui and New Bell are the largest. Between them, in August 2010, the two prisons held more than 6,000 inmates, compared to an established capacity of about 1,500. The two prisons therefore held about four times the inmate population they were built for.

**Change the corrupt judicial system of Cameroon.** The overcrowded of our prisons are due to the poor judicial system. There are lots of innocent people in prison. The investigations are carried out by the judicial police and the gendarmes, who act as auxiliaries of the state counsel. Both the judicial police, state counsel and all those involved in the investigation and judgment of individuals are so ungodly corrupt. By so doing they send innocent citizens to prison. **I plead with the United States government to give a helping hand to the helpless human right defenders in Cameroon to put a stop to these professional malpractices.**

Pierre Roger Lambo Sandjo, also known as Lapiro de Mbanga was a very popular, Cameroonian musician and political activist brutally tortured by the Buya regime. *Sandjo had written a song entitled "Constipated Constitution" 47, that criticized an amendment to the Cameroonian constitution what would have allowed Biya to be president for life and grants him immunity for any crime he committed while in power.* The regime persecuted Sandjo because of this song and because he participated in peaceful demonstrations in Mbanga in 2008 that opposed the amendment. Human rights defenders in Cameroon protested when Sandjo was arrested. This protest fell on deaf ears and Sandjo was sentenced to three years of prison and a fine of 330 million CFA francs.

Sandjo was released on 8 April 2011 after he completed his prison term. He was granted asylum in the U.S. He died in exile in the U.S. from cancer coupled with the inhuman

treatment he sustained while in prison aged 56. Amnesty International considered Sandjo a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

I am calling on President Barack Obama and the American Government to help my country from injustice, unfairness, un-lawful killings, persecutions and all sort of human right violations. And also help my people from tyranny and fear in the hands of the dictator president Paul Biya.

I want to thank the US government for all the good things they have been doing to my country, precisely the helping hands they are offering to all the refugees and asylum seekers from Cameroon. I equally want to extend my gratitude to all the staff members of Torture Abolition and Survival support Coalition (TASSC) International for the good job they are doing to support torture survivors.

God bless President Barack Obama, God bless the American congressmen, God bless TASSC International, and God bless America.  
Thank you Lord.